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Homosexuality: Challenging the Church to Grow

JOHN J. MCNEILL

IT HAS BEEN more than ten years since I wrote *The Church and the Homosexual* (Sheed Andrews & McMeel, 1976). I wrote the book out of love for and loyalty to the Christian tradition in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular, and out of a desire to support the church's moral authority. I felt what I had to do as a trained professional moral theologian was to play the role of a critical lover and loving critic and try to help the church realize a viable ethic concerning homosexuality. I also wrote it out of love for and loyalty to the homosexual community.

Certainly one of the major motivating factors behind my work for the past 20 years—in research, writing and psychotherapy, and in the pastoral activities of preaching, leading retreats and giving lectures and workshops to gay people—is the fact that I myself am a homosexual. It was with great struggle and pain that I gradually learned to accept that essential aspect of myself and learned to live with it with a certain degree of peace, joy and even pride. I have wanted to share that grace with as many people as possible. I agree with Meister Eckardt: "The fruitfulness of a gift is the only true way to show gratitude for the gift."

Most importantly, I wrote *The Church and the*

Homosexual because of my increasing awareness of the enormous amount of unjust suffering in the Christian gay community. I observed that many, if not most, lesbian women and homosexual men felt caught in a dilemma: to accept themselves and to affirm their sexuality, they believed that they must leave the church and even give up their faith; and to affirm their Christian faith, they felt that they had to repress and deny their sexuality and lead a life devoid of any sexual intimacy. The evidence was clear to me that both solutions led to an unhappy and unhealthy life. I was convinced that what is bad psychologically has to be bad theologically and that, conversely, whatever is good theologically is certainly good psychologically. For as St. Irenaeus claimed, "The glory of God are humans fully alive."

In *The Church and the Homosexual* I sought to overturn three traditional stances taken by the Christian community regarding lesbian and homosexual relationships. I opposed, first of all, the view that God intends all human beings to be heterosexual, and that therefore a failure to be heterosexual represents a deviation from God's creative plan—a deviation that demands an explanation, usually given in terms of sin or, more recently, in terms of sickness. According to this view, those who find themselves to be homosexual must change their orientation through prayer and counseling or, failing that, live totally chaste and sexually loveless lives. This is the position held in the Vatican letter "On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" issued last October to all the bishops of the world. This letter was deemed necessary to offset "deceitful propaganda" coming from gay Christian groups challenging the church's tradition and its in-

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terpretation of Scripture. According to this position, sexual fulfillment is exclusively the right of the heterosexual.

I proposed instead that God so created humans that they develop with a great variety of both gender identities and sexual-object choices. Consequently, the attempt to force humans into narrow heterosexist categories of what it means to be a man or a woman can destroy the great richness and variety of God's creation. Always and everywhere a certain percentage of men and women develop as homosexuals or lesbians. They should be considered as part of God's creative plan. Their sexual orientation has no necessary connection with sin, sickness or failure; rather, it is a gift from God to be accepted and lived out with gratitude. God does not despise anything that God has created.

It should be stressed here, in opposition to certain current views, that human beings do not choose their sexual orientation; they discover it as something given. To pray for a change in sexual orientation is about as meaningful as to pray for a change from blue eyes to brown. Furthermore, there is no healthy way to reverse or change sexual orientation once it is established. The claim of certain groups to be able to change homosexuals into heterosexuals has been shown to be spurious and frequently based on homophobia (cf. Ralph Blair's pamphlet "Ex-Gay" [HCCC Inc., 1982]). The usual technique used to bring about this pseudo-change involves helping gay persons internalize self-hatred, an approach that frequently causes great psychological harm and suffering. The Christian communities that make use of this sort of ministry usually do so to avoid any challenge to their traditional attitude and to avoid any dialogue with self-accepting gays and truly professional psychotherapists. (The psychotherapists whom these churches frequently cite are generally very conservative and homophobic in their orientation.) The real choice that faces lesbians and homosexuals is not between heterosexuality and homosexuality but between a homosexual relationship or no relational intimacy whatsoever.

Other churches have confined their official ministries to helping gay people live out celibate lives. According to Christian tradition, celibacy is a special gift of God given to a certain few for the sake of the kingdom. The occasional homosexual who receives this gift is, indeed, blessed. Clergy choose a celibate lifestyle voluntarily, but laypeople are given no choice; they are told they must live celibate lives. But there is no reason to believe that God grants this gift to everyone who is lesbian or homosexual. On the contrary, empirical studies have shown that the vast majority of gay people who have attempted a celibate lifestyle end up acting out their sexual needs in promiscuous and self-destructive ways. Every human being has a God-given right to sexual love and intimacy. Anyone who would deny this right to any individual must prove without a doubt the grounds for this denial. The only healthy and holy Christian response to a homosexual orientation is to learn to accept it and live it out in a way that is consonant with Christian values.

The second thesis of my book was that homosexuals, rather than being somehow a menace to the values of society and the family, as Christians have tended to assume, have, as a part of God's creative plan, special gifts and qualities and a very positive contribution to make to the development of society (cf. also my article "Homosexuality, Lesbianism, and the Future: The Creative Role of the Gay Community in Building a More Humane Society," in *A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*, edited by Robert Nugent [Crossroad, 1984]). Indeed, if lesbians and homosexuals were to disappear, the further development of society toward greater humanness could be seriously endangered. Consequently, I am convinced that there is a special providence in the emergence of visible gay communities within the Christian churches at this point in history.

The third thesis of my book was perhaps the most controversial. The traditional position has been that since every homosexual act is sinful and contrary to God's plan, the love that exists between gay people is a sinful love which alienates the lovers from God. I argued that the love between two lesbians or two homosexuals, assuming that it is a constructive human love, is not sinful nor does it alienate the lovers from God's plan, but can be a holy love, mediating God's presence in the human community as effectively as heterosexual love.

I fully appreciated how controversial my arguments were. But I pointed out that there was new evidence—from biblical studies and from various empirical studies in the human sciences, especially psychology and sociology—that completely undermined the traditional understanding of homosexuality as a chosen and changeable state. Examples of recent psychological data



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come from new insights into psychosexual development, e.g., (a) one has no choice about sexual orientation; (b) the only healthy reaction to being homosexual is to accept it. And, above all else, there was new evidence coming from the collective experience of lesbians and homosexuals who as committed Christians were seeking to live their lives in conformity with Christian faith and Christian values. All this evidence should give every Christian community serious reason to reconsider its understanding of homosexuality.

I HOPED that my book would open up a serious moral debate in the churches concerning homosexuality. But in ten years no such debate has taken place. My own church's response was to try to silence the messenger rather than debate the message. One year after my book's publication, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ordered me to be silent on the issue of homosexuality and sexual ethics, forbidding me to publish

anything further in the field. For nine years I obeyed that order to be silent. However, the recent letter on pastoral care of homosexuals (already referred to), as well as the demand by the Vatican that ethicist Charles Curran retract his position on homosexuality and other sexual moral issues, or relinquish his position as a Catholic theologian, and its more recent order to me that I give up all ministry to homosexual persons, have convinced me that I can no longer in conscience remain silent.

It is the AIDS crisis that above all else makes it clear that churches do not have the luxury of time in dealing with homosexuality. In the U.S. alone as of February 9, there had already been 30,632 recorded cases of AIDS and 17,542 recorded fatalities, a majority of them gay men. It is predicted that in the next decade there may be as many as 200,000 victims. I am convinced that the churches will not respond properly to this crisis until they resolve the underlying moral issues. The Catholic Church in its recent pastoral letter has taken a dogmatic stance, allowing no room for debate or dialogue. But my ultimate religious obedience must be to truth, justice and the will of God as revealed in the sufferings of the Christian gay community. Therefore, with the publication of this article, I am making my first detailed public statement in ten years on the issue of homosexuality.

I find the absence of a serious moral debate within American churches on homosexuality truly puzzling. Robert Bellah and his associates throw some general light on this absence in their recent sociological study of American culture, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Harper & Row, 1985). They point out that the liberal middle class has a therapeutic mentality which is uncomfortable with moral argument. Those who share the therapeutic attitude embrace pluralism and the uniqueness of the individual, and conclude that there is no common moral ground and no publicly relevant morality. They tend to see moral debate as leading inevitably to irresolvable conflict or coercion.

Bellah and his co-authors acknowledge that the therapeutic critique of traditional morality is frequently legitimate. "Where standards of right and wrong are asserted with dogmatic certainty and are not open to discussion, and, even worse, where these standards merely express the interests of the stronger party in a relationship while clothing those interests in moralistic language, then that criticism is indeed justified" (p. 140). Most gay people share this distrust of morality. Having been the victims of moralistic condemnation and control, they eagerly adopt the therapeutic live-and-let-live stance.

The mainline Protestant churches, too, share the therapeutic mentality. In place of the moral question, Is this right or wrong? they pose the therapeutic question, Is this going to work? The liberal churches tend to assert individual autonomy and freedom, and the right to do your own thing. However, this therapeutic attitude is usually accompanied by an institutional search for compromise on moral issues. For example, some churches, in

the face of psychological evidence that sexual orientation is not freely chosen, have begun to distinguish between homosexual orientation—which, they agree, is not morally culpable—and homosexual activity, which is always morally wrong insofar as it is freely chosen. This compromise is intrinsically unstable. It reminds me of the nursery ditty: "Mother may I go out to swim?" "Yes, my darling daughter. Hang your clothes on the hickory bush, but don't go near the water!"

Only a sadistic God would create hundreds of thousands of humans to be inherently homosexual and then deny them the right to sexual intimacy. I, for one, would prefer to believe that the church is wrong about homosexual activity than that this sadistic, superego God has any true relation to the God of love revealed by Jesus.

Conservative and fundamentalist churches, for their part, also do not engage in moral debate. They feel that they have a clear and direct revelation of God's will concerning homosexuality, and they vigorously condemn it on the basis of biblical fundamentalism and a conservative acceptance of certain cultural mores, especially in the sexual realm (such as the dominance of men over women).

Christians opposed to gay rights frequently cite Genesis 19, the story of Sodom. The history of the interpretation of this passage displays how prejudice and homophobia have distorted the message of Scripture. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the sin of Sodom was never understood as homosexuality. Rather, that sin was understood as selfishness, pride, neglect of the poor and inhospitality to strangers. (In the desert context of these passages, inhospitality to a stranger meant certain death.) For example, Ezekiel writes, "Behold, this was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters lived in pride, plenty and thoughtless ease; they supported not the poor and the needy; they grew haughty and committed abominations [sexual orgies to bring fertility] before me. So I swept them away . . ." (16: 49-50). And every time Jesus refers to Sodom he identifies the sin of that city as inhospitality to strangers. For example, in Luke, Jesus says of those towns that were inhospitable to his disciples: "I tell you on that day Sodom will fare better than that town" (10: 12).

In *The Church and the Homosexual* I traced the interesting historical process by which the biblical condemnation of inhospitality was transformed into a condemnation of homosexuality. Here is one of the supreme ironies of history: for thousands of years in the Christian West, homosexuals have been the victims of inhospitable treatment—the true crime of Sodom—in the name of a mistaken understanding of Sodom's crime. Inhospitality, the crime that cries out to God for vengeance, has been and continues to be repeated every day. Who in our midst lives in pride and plenty and thoughtless ease, neglecting the poor, being inhospitable to refugees and persecuting those who, like Lot, offer them sanctuary? They indeed are the sodomites!

The absence of serious moral debate leaves conserv-

ative and even reactionary moral forces as the only voice on the subject of homosexuality. When a crisis comes, such as when gays fall ill with AIDS, they can easily be victimized by traditional homophobia disguised as moral judgment and, as a result, fall back into self-condemnation and self-hatred. As noted, self-hatred and internalized homophobia undermine gay relationships and tempt gay people to act out sexual needs in self-destructive ways. In the age of AIDS, only two choices are really open to Christian gay people in conformity with Christian values: abstaining from all sexual activity—a response which the majority find impossible—or entering a monogamous relationship. However, to have a stable, healthy relationship, one needs to have a healthy self-love and self-acceptance, which is psychologically possible only when one can accept one's sexuality as morally good and, in a Christian context, compatible with God's love.

A striking example of the negative result of the absence of an open debate on the moral meaning of homosexuality is the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding the rights of states to outlaw sodomy. In the majority opinion, Justice Byron White argued that the right to privacy does not extend to same-gender sexual activity, even when confined to the home. He accepted the state of Georgia's argument that sodomy laws can be justified by the need to protect morality. Chief Justice Warren Burger concurred with Justice White that "to establish a fundamental right to homosexual sodomy would be to cast aside millennia of moral teaching."

Here is an example of traditional homophobia disguised as moral judgment and the will of God. Even the court's dissenting opinion, expressed by Justice Harry Blackmun, entirely avoids the moral issue. "That certain, but by no means all, religious groups condemn the behavior at issue," wrote Blackmun, "gives the state no license to

impose [its] judgments on the entire citizenry. The legitimacy of legislation depends instead on whether the state can advance some justification for its law beyond its conformity to religious doctrine." Blackmun's opposition to the law is based on the right to privacy, "the most comprehensive of rights and the most valued by civilized men, [namely] the right to be left alone."

BOTH GAY PEOPLE and the liberal churches are wrong to steer clear of moral debate, or to think that moral standards are, as described in *Habits of the Heart*, "inherently authoritarian and in the service of domination." On the contrary, there are standards of right and wrong within Christian tradition concerning human sexuality, based in human nature and biblical revelation, which are acceptable to homosexual and heterosexual alike, and which can form the moral basis of public policy.

In light of the gay Christian experience, however, two fundamental issues of sexual morality must be re-examined. The first issue is what makes a sexual act fully human; the second is the biblical understanding of homosexual acts.

Christian tradition has always emphasized that human sexuality has two primary functions—it provides an experience of loving intimacy ("It is not good that a human be alone. Every human has need of a companion" [Gen. 2:18]); and it is the means of procreation. What is unique to human sexuality is the fusion that God has made of biological sexuality with the uniquely human vocation to, and capacity for, love.

The debate over birth control some years ago led liberal churches to conclude that the relational aspect of sexuality has primacy and, when appropriate, can be separated from the procreational aspect. Even the Catholic Church acknowledged the value of heterosexual activity exclusively as an expression of love when it approved the rhythm method of birth control. At that moment, if the church had been logical and free of homophobia, it would have re-examined the value of homosexual activity as an expression of human love and companionship.

What does Scripture have to say about homosexuality? The Christian community now possesses for the first time some excellent scholarly works on the treatment of homosexuality in Scripture, such as Robin Scroggs's *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Fortress, 1984) and George Edwards's *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (Pilgrim, 1984). We also have an excellent study of the development of Christian tradition regarding homosexuality: John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). And there are some very good theological reflections on human sexuality in the light of Christian revelation; see James Nelson's, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Pilgrim, 1978) and *Be-*

Winter Aconite

In February
Or early March
The aconite
Rewards my search
By being first
To blossom where
The sun has swept
A cranny bare
Of stubborn snow,
A space so small
It scarcely seems
A miracle
Could happen there.
A star is born
Of winter's lack;
My doubt is shorn.

John Robert Quinn.

tween Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience. (Pilgrim, 1983).

These scholars conclude that nowhere in Scripture is there a clear condemnation of a loving sexual relationship between two gay persons. Homosexuality is never mentioned in the Four Gospels' accounts of the ministry of Jesus—a silence that would be inexplicable if this were the "most heinous crime," as tradition claims. Scriptural authors never deal with homosexual orientation, and when they do treat homosexual activity, they never do so in the context of a loving relationship. They presuppose that they are dealing with lustful activity freely chosen by heterosexuals (as in Romans 1), or they deal with a humanly destructive activity in the context of idolatry, prostitution, promiscuity, violent rape, seduction of children or violation of guests' rights.

There can be no valid moral debate on these issues that does not include lesbian and gay people as full participants. The Holy Spirit has something to say to the



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churches in and through the experience of lesbian and homosexual Christians. A truly extraordinary witness to the kind of full human love that can exist between two gay persons is being manifested daily by AIDS victims and their lovers and friends. The exceptional fidelity, self-sacrifice and affection, as well as the pain, grief and sorrow and the deep spiritual response to the suffering and bereavement that is being expressed, is a sign to the churches of the presence of the Spirit of love in these relationships. "See how they love one another!"

The recent paper produced by Lutherans Concerned, "A Call for Dialogue: Gay and Lesbian Christians and the Ministry of the Lutheran Church," is an example of the eloquent theological reflections that are coming from gay Christians. Similar statements have been made by the Catholic gay group, Dignity; the Episcopal group,

Integrity; the Methodist group, Affirmation; the Metropolitan Community Church; Evangelicals Concerned and others.

Lutherans Concerned summarizes its theological reflection with the following observation: "Indeed, gay and lesbian Christians, like any other Christians who have had deep encounters with the word of the Gospel, are able to see the word speaking directly and profoundly to their own experience. Lesbians and gay men will be bold enough to offer new insight into the Gospel to the whole community of Christ. They will claim the biblical word for themselves, in the experience of hoping and believing in the Gospel, of trusting in one's own conscience, even in the face of opposition. . . . Ultimately, lesbian and gay people within the church will make a great contribution to construction of relational ethics and to evangelical outreach, which we pray will draw many others who are estranged, alienated or unloved, to Jesus Christ, to the household of faith, and into the reconciliation which has begun."

All in all, this is a great moment to be gay and Christian. This is the age when the Holy Spirit is fulfilling the promise made in Isaiah (56: 2-8) that after the Messiah comes and the new covenant is established, those who are sexually different, who were formerly excluded from the community of God, will have a special place in the house of the Lord and "an everlasting name which shall not be cut off." The fulfillment of this prophecy was foreshadowed when the Holy Spirit led the apostle Philip to encounter the eunuch, who was reading Isaiah (Acts 8:26-40). The author of Acts intended to show how under the new covenant the church, led by the Holy Spirit, would reach out to include all those who were excluded by the Old Testament's procreational covenant. The eunuch symbolizes all those excluded from the Old Testament community because they were sexually different. The eunuch believed in Christ as the Messiah, was baptized, received the Spirit and went off "full of joy."

"My house," God says through Isaiah, "shall be called a house of prayer for all people." The gay Christian movement is continuing this initiative of the Holy Spirit, offering the Christian churches a challenge and an opportunity to grow to the full stature of the human family. ■

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Reuniting Sexuality and Spirituality

JAMES B. NELSON

THE TITLE of this *Christian Century* series, *After the Revolution: The Church and Sexual Ethics*, suggests two things: that there has been a sexual revolution, and that the revolution is over. Though in some ways both claims are true, in other ways the revolution has just begun. Clearly the past quarter-century has witnessed significant changes in the cultural and religious understandings of sex roles, sex outside marriage, homosexuality, single-parent families, the explicit portrayal and discussion of sexual matters and so on. These shifts were spurred by a new American affluence, by the Pill, by the flood of women into the work force, by the destabilization of traditional values during the war in Vietnam, and by a new societal emphasis on self-fulfillment. None of these changes was total and none occurred without considerable resistance; yet it is evident that something of major importance happened.

Then, in the Orwellian year 1984, no less an authority than *Time* magazine declared that "The Revolution Is Over" (April 9). Veterans of the sexual revolution, said *Time*, are both bored and wounded. The one-night stand has lost its sheen, we were told. "Commitment" and "intimacy" are in (helped by the scourges of herpes and AIDS), and celibacy is again a respectable option. The "me generation" is giving way to the "we generation." Religious and political reaction has followed the rise of feminism, gay/lesbian activism and the plurality of family forms.

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All this is true enough. But it is not that simple—particularly not in regard to religious attitudes. Some years ago Paul Ricoeur observed that there have been three major stages in the Western understanding of the relation of sexuality to religion (cf "Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma," in *Sexuality and Identity*, edited by Hendrik Ruitenbeek [Dell, 1970], pp. 13 ff.). The earliest stage closely identified the two forces, incorporating sexuality into religious myth and ritual. In the second stage, accompanying the rise of the great world religions, the two spheres were separated: the sacred became increasingly transcendent while sexuality was demythologized and confined to a small part of the earthly order (procreation within institutionalized marriage). Sexuality's power was feared, restrained and disciplined.

Ricoeur notes that there now seems to be emerging a third period, marked by the desire to reunite sexuality with the experience of the sacred. This desire is prompted by a more wholistic understanding of the person and of the ways in which sexuality is present in all of human experience. If sexual expression is still seen as needing ordering and discipline, as it was in the second period, there is also, as there was in the first period, a sense of its spiritual power.

I, too, believe that we are edging into that third period—however unevenly. Of course, the sexual revolution of the '60s and '70s was itself uneven: some of the constructive power of sexuality was released, and gains were made in sexual justice and equality, but at the same time some sexual experience was trivialized. Never-

theless, that revolution did create an important opening to the third period.

Perhaps never before in the history of the church has there been so much open ferment as there is now about issues of sexuality. The outpouring of treatises, debates, studies, pronouncements and movements bent on reforming religious-sexual attitudes (or protecting them from unwanted change) has been unprecedented. In all of these developments there are signs that a paradigmatic shift in the religious perceptions of human sexuality is under way. There are seven signs of this shift that I find particularly striking.

1. *There has been a shift from theologies of sexuality to sexual theologies.* Before the past two decades, the vast preponderance of Christian writers on sexuality assumed that the question before them was simply: What does Christianity (the Bible, the tradition, ecclesiastical authority, etc.) say about sexuality? Now we are also asking: What does our experience of human sexuality say about our perceptions of faith—our experience of God, our interpretations of Scripture and tradition, our ways of living out the gospel?

This shift derives in part from a recovery of 19th-century liberal theology's emphasis on experience as important theological data—an emphasis now embraced by various forms of liberation theology. It derives, too, from the feminist and lesbian/gay movements, both of which have claimed that it is their consciousness of sexual oppression that has afforded them crucial insights about the ways of God in human relationships. The term "sexual theology," like the term "liberation theology," suggests this dialogical, two-directional investigation.

The two-way conversation model reminds us that theology cannot presume to look down upon human sexuality from some unaffected, Olympian vantage point. It reminds us that every theological perception contains some elements and perceptions conditioned by sexual experience, and every sexual experience is perceived and interpreted through religious lenses of some kind. The difference between a unidirectional and a dialogical method is the difference between a theology of sexuality and a sexual theology.

2. *There has been a shift from understanding sexuality as either incidental to or detrimental to the experience of God toward understanding sexuality as intrinsic to the divine-human experience.* Sexual dualism has marked much of the Christian tradition. In this dualism, spirit is opposed to body, with spirit assumed to be higher and superior and the body lower and inferior. The companion of this dualism has been sexism or patriarchy: men identify themselves essentially with the spirit (mind), while men identify women with the body (matter), and assume that the higher needs to control the lower.

Implicit in sexual dualism has been the notion of divine impassivity—the *apathy* of God. If the body is marked by passion and if spirit is passionless, then bodily hunger (*eros*) has no connection with the divine. God is without hunger, and the human hungers (of which sexuality, with

its drive to connection and intimacy, is one of the most basic) seem to have no connection with our experience of God.

While the recent sexual revolution often seemed more intent on self-fulfillment through unfettered pleasure than on the quest for intimacy, it did prompt new theological reflection on the spiritual significance of sexual hunger. If some of our Protestant forebears of three centuries ago were right in believing that companionship, not procreation, is central in God's design for sexuality, then the human hunger for physical and emotional intimacy is of enormous spiritual significance. It ought not be denigrated as unbecoming to the spiritual life. Thus theology has been giving new attention to the insight that sexuality is crucial to God's design that creatures not dwell in isolation and loneliness but in communion and community.

ACCOMPANYING the attack on dualism has been the reclaiming of incarnational theology. This theology emphasizes that the most decisive experience of God is not in doctrine, creed or ideas but in the Word made flesh—and in the Word still becoming flesh. Here has been another opening to the possibility that sexuality is intrinsic to the experience of God. Such experience has been described by Nikos Kazantzakis: "Within me even the most metaphysical problem takes on a warm physical body which smells of sea, soil, and human sweat. The Word, in order to touch me, must become warm flesh. Only then do I understand—when I can smell, see, and touch" (*Report to Greco* [Cassirer, 1965], p. 43).

3. *There has been a shift from understanding sexual sin as a matter of wrong sexual acts to understanding sexual sin as alienation from our intended sexuality.* The Christian tradition has had a pronounced tendency to define sexual sin as specific acts. This approach gained momentum during the early Middle Ages when penitential manuals were first written detailing the nature of specific sins and their proper penances. Those manuals paid the greatest attention to sexual matters. Indeed, in our heritage, "sin" and "morality" have had a markedly sexual focus (a "morals charge" never refers to an economic injustice!). Sexual sins thus became physiologically definable and capable of neat categorization. They were those particular acts either prohibited by scriptural texts or contrary to natural law—acts done with the wrong person, in the wrong way or for the wrong purpose.

Actually, Christian theology at its best has recognized that sin is not fundamentally an act but rather the condition of alienation or estrangement out of which harmful acts may arise. However, it has taken a long time for theology to acknowledge that sexual sin is fundamentally alienation from our divinely intended sexuality. To put it overly simply but I hope accurately: sexual sin lies not in being too sexual, but in being not sexual enough—in the way God has intended us to be. Such alienation, indeed, usually leads to harmful acts, but the sin is rooted in the prior condition.

Sexual sin lies in the dualistic alienation by which the body becomes an object, either to be constrained out of fear (the Victorian approach) or to be treated as a pleasure machine (the *Playboy* philosophy). It lies in the dualistic alienation by which females are kept from claiming their assertiveness and males kept from claiming their vulnerability. It lies in the alienation which finds expression in sexual violence, in Rambo-like militarism, in racism, in ecological abuse. The uncompleted sexual revolution began to recognize some of this. While in its superficial and exploitative moments it wanted to wipe away the category of sexual sin ("If it feels good, do it"), in its better moments it helped us see that sexual sin is really something different from, and more than, particular acts which can be neatly defined.

4. *There has been a shift from understanding salvation as antisexual to knowing that there is "sexual salvation."* Because spiritualistic dualism has conditioned so much of the Christian tradition, Christians have inherited a disembodied notion of salvation: salvation means release from the lower (fleshly) into the higher (spiritual) life. Accordingly, popular piety has typically viewed the saints as asexual beings, without sexual needs and desires and sometimes even without genitalia.

The sexual revolution helped convince many Christians that an incarnationalist faith embraces the redemption of alienated sexuality as well as other estranged dimensions of our lives. *Justification by grace* signifies God's unconditional, unmerited, radical acceptance of the whole person: God, the Cosmic Lover, graciously embraces not just a person's disembodied spirit but the whole fleshly self—the meanings of which theology is only beginning to explore.

Sanctification means growth in holiness (or wholeness and health—the root word is the same). Many have begun to realize that God intends increasing sexual wholeness to be part of our redemption. Like any other good belief, this view can be perverted, but it need not be. Sexual sanctification can mean growth in bodily self-acceptance, in the capacity for sensuousness, in the capacity for play, in the diffusion of the erotic throughout the body (rather than in its genitalization) and in the embrace of the androgynous possibility.

5. *There has been a shift from an act-centered sexual ethics to a relational sexual ethics.* For all of its oversimplifications, Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics* (1966) prompted a good deal of ethical rethinking. More sophisticated approaches to contextual-relational ethics and an ethics of response/responsibility, differently expressed by such thinkers as H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Lehmann, had a major impact on ethical thought in the '60s.

Act-oriented sexual ethics had dominated most of the Christian tradition, bearing the assumption that the rightness or wrongness of a particular sexual expression could be ascertained by the intrinsic value or disvalue of the action itself, without serious consideration of the relational context. The alternative seemed normlessness

and subjectivism, particularly dangerous in sexuality issues, where passions run high. A relational sexual ethics has appeared to many as a way of avoiding legalism on the one hand and normless subjectivism on the other.

Roman Catholic sexual ethics, with its strong natural law tradition and clearly defined ecclesiastical teaching authority, has been more inclined toward objective sexual norms than has Protestant ethics with its heavy scriptural orientation. Both, however, have been more objectivistic and act-focused in sexual issues than in any other moral sphere. In recent years, however, numerous persons in both traditions have moved toward a new and creative sexual ethics.

ACT-ORIENTED ethics has appeared inadequate not only in cases with unique contexts and meanings, but in light of a growing recognition that Christian sexual ethics has been inadequately integrated into a wholistic spirituality. If sexuality is the physiological and psychological grounding of our capacities to love, if our destiny after the image of the Cosmic Lover is to be lovers in the richest, fullest sense of that good word, then how does sexual ethics figure into our spiritual destiny? What are our creative and fitting sexual responses to the divine loving? What are the appropriate sexual meanings that will embody the meanings of Word becoming flesh?

These are the questions that seem increasingly appropriate to many. For example, in a promising and controversial book published ten years ago, a group of Roman Catholic scholars proposed that Catholic sexual ethics stop centering on procreation, natural law and the physical contours of sexual acts and focus instead on the creative growth toward personal integration. Such growth and integration, they suggested, would be promoted by sexual expressions that are self-liberating, other-enriching, honest, faithful, socially responsible, life-serving and joyous. These, the authors proposed, are marks of a gospel ethic of love (Anthony Kosnick et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* [Paulist/Newman, 1977]). Rome's clear retreat from such Vatican II directions as these is evidence that the paradigm shift is still very uneven. But countless members of the Catholic Church know that a significant change is under way.

6. *There has been a shift from understanding the church as asexual to understanding it as a sexual community.* Through most of the church's history it has viewed sexuality as either incidental or inimical to its life. But the sexual revolution resulted in a growing self-consciousness and empowerment on the part of the sexually oppressed. Religious feminism articulated the ways in which the church has always been a sexual community—the ways it has incorporated patriarchy into its language, worship, theological imagery, leadership patterns and ethics. A rising gay/lesbian consciousness performed a similar function in regard to the church's heterosexism. Gradual-

At the same time, the fact that the United States is the only country in the world that has a free press is a testament to the strength of our democratic values. The American people have the right to know what their government is doing, and the press has the duty to provide that information. This is a fundamental principle of our society, and it is one that we must always protect and defend.

It is also important to remember that the press is not just a passive observer of events. It is an active participant in the democratic process. By reporting on the actions of the government and the people, the press helps to shape public opinion and to hold those in power accountable. This is a vital role, and it is one that the press must always be prepared to fulfill.

In conclusion, the press is a cornerstone of our democratic society. It is a body that is free to report on the actions of the government and the people, and it is a body that is responsible for providing the public with the information they need to make informed decisions. This is a noble and essential task, and it is one that the press must always be prepared to undertake.

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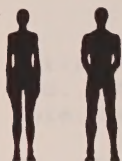
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ly, other groups—singles (including the widowed and divorced), the aging, those with handicapping conditions, the ill—have begun to recognize how churchly assumptions and practices have sexually disenfranchised them.

Another impetus for claiming and reforming the church as a sexual community has come from the increasing desire to reunite sexuality and spirituality. The realization



God, the cosmic Lover,
graciously embraces not
just a person's
disembodied spirit but
the whole fleshly self.

that Protestant worship has been marked by a masculinist focus on the spoken word and by a suspicion of bodily feelings suggested the need to explore and touch the varied senses more inclusively. The recognition that most theology has given only lip service to the incarnation, failing to take ongoing incarnationism seriously in both method and content, inspired the effort to explore the doing and meaning of body theology. The fact that Christian education has seriously ignored sex education prompted the attempt to address sexual meanings as part of faith's journey, for young and old. Much of the recent ferment in theology, ethics, worship, leadership, pastoral care and education has been a direct result of this effort to recognize and reform the church as a sexual community.

7. *There has been a shift from understanding sexuality as a private issue to understanding it as a personal and public one.* Sexual issues will always be deeply personal, but personal does not mean private. One mark of Victorian sexuality was its privatization. Not only was sexuality not to be talked about, it was to be confined to a small portion of one's private life. But this, quite literally, was idiocy (the Greek root for *idiot* refers to the person who attempts to live the private life, ignorant of the public domain).

One of the church's recent discoveries is the public dimension of sexuality issues. On the social-action agenda of mainline denominations today are sexual-justice issues regarding gender and sexual orientation. No longer foreign to church concern are issues of abortion, family planning and population control, sexual abuse and violence, pornography, prostitution, reproductive technologies, varied family forms, sexually transmitted diseases, teen-age pregnancy and the reassessment of men's identity. All these issues are obviously sexual, and all are public.

Even newer than this development is the nascent discovery of sexual dimensions in issues that previously had not appeared to have sexual connections, such as social violence. Violence, whether in the form of crime in the streets, the arms race, or economic or foreign policy, has important sexual aspects. To be sure, the sources and

manifestations of violence are complex. But what do we make of competitiveness, the cult of winning, the armor-ing of emotions, the tendency to dichotomize reality, the abstraction from bodily concreteness and the exaggerated fear of death that is manifested in a morbid fascination with it? These phenomena feed social violence, and all are deeply related to distortions of sexuality, particularly of male sexuality.

Years ago James Weldon Johnson observed that sexuality is deeply implicated in race problems as well. Historically, white males' categorization of women ("either virgins or whores") proceeded along racial lines: white women were symbols of delicacy and purity, whereas black women symbolized an animality which could be sexually and economically exploited. White male guilt was projected onto the black male, who was imagined as a dark, supersexual beast who must be punished and from whom white women must be protected. Black mothers nurtured their sons to be docile, hoping to protect them from white male wrath. That upbringing in turn complicated black marriages and led to certain destructive attempts to recover black "manliness." We are the heirs of a distorted racial history in which sexual dynamics have been a major force.

Sexual dynamics are also pervasive and significant when we examine economic exploitation and ecological abuse. Two decades ago, Peirce Teilhard de Chardin observed: "The prevailing view has been that the body . . . is a *fragment* of the Universe, a piece completely detached from the rest and handed over to a spirit that informs it. In the future we shall have to say that the Body is the very Universality of things. . . . *My matter* is not a *part* of the Universe that I possess *totaliter*: it is the *totality* of the Universe possessed by me *partialiter*" (*Science and Christ* [Harper & Row, 1968], pp. 12 f). Theology has been slowly recognizing this fact.

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION of the '60s and '70s is mostly over, and some of its superficial and exploitative forms of freedom have proved to be just that. Hurt, boredom and disease have sobered more than a few—and the forces of religious and political reaction rejoice. But this revolution was a harbinger of a much more significant change that Ricoeur foresaw. The change is just beginning. It is uneven, misunderstood and resisted, as well as eagerly welcomed and hoped-for. Nevertheless, in my view a paradigmatic shift is indeed under way.

This will not be the first time in Christian history that a major shift has taken place in the perception of sexuality. In the 17th century some Protestants—especially Puritans, Anglicans and Quakers—began to affirm that loving companionship, not procreation, is the central meaning of sexuality. This cultural-religious revolution is still unfinished. I take heart from the fact that even more far-reaching change is taking place as we investigate how sexuality and spirituality are part and parcel of each other, and as we affirm that the Word continues to become flesh and dwell among us. *This* revolution has just begun. ■

It is often possible to find the answer to the question of whether a person is a member of a particular group by looking at the person's behavior. If a person's behavior is consistent with the behavior of the members of a particular group, then it is likely that the person is a member of that group. For example, if a person is a member of a particular group, then they will likely have the same beliefs, values, and attitudes as the other members of the group.

For the purpose of this study, the following definition of a group was used: "A group is a collection of two or more individuals who are interdependent and who interact with one another." This definition is based on the idea that a group is a collection of individuals who are interdependent and who interact with one another. This definition is also consistent with the idea that a group is a collection of individuals who share a common identity and who are committed to the group's goals and objectives.



The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between group membership and individual behavior. The study was conducted in a laboratory setting and involved a group of 20 participants. The participants were assigned to a group and were given a task to complete. The task was designed to be a group task, meaning that the participants had to work together to complete the task. The participants were then observed and their behavior was recorded. The results of the study showed that group membership had a significant effect on individual behavior. Specifically, participants who were members of a group were more likely to conform to the group's norms and to engage in group-oriented behavior than participants who were not members of a group.

The results of this study have important implications for our understanding of group behavior. First, the results suggest that group membership is an important factor in determining individual behavior. Second, the results suggest that group norms play a significant role in determining individual behavior. Finally, the results suggest that group-oriented behavior is more likely to occur when individuals are members of a group than when they are not members of a group.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the study was conducted in a laboratory setting, which may not be representative of real-world situations. Second, the study only involved a group of 20 participants, which may not be representative of larger groups. Finally, the study only measured one aspect of individual behavior, which may not be representative of all aspects of individual behavior.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between group membership and individual behavior. The results suggest that group membership is an important factor in determining individual behavior and that group norms play a significant role in determining individual behavior. These findings have important implications for our understanding of group behavior and for the development of effective group management strategies.

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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GAY/LESBIAN PEOPLE TO THE HUMAN RACE

The Rev. Jeffrey Pulling, Ph.D.
Office of Ministry Resources, UFMCC

The future belongs to us. Obviously we gay and lesbian people still have many foes and critics, but they will not win out in the end. What we gay and lesbian people have to offer is exactly what this world needs to survive and to thrive into the next century.

In England the white birch trees have become grey and black as a result of industrialization. The salt and pepper moth has for thousands of years had the best protective colouring and thus the best chance for survival among the birches. But now these moths are easily recognizable against the dark birch background and an easy prey to their enemies. Now from time to time black mutations of this moth had already appeared. As long as the birches were white the black moths fell victim to selection. Now, however, they had a better chance of survival. Gradually the moths as a species became darker. In their new situation a dark colouring, which was once dysfunctional, gave them a chance of survival.

Gay and lesbian people can be seen as "black moths" such as this. Up to this century our generally non-procreative lifestyle was not needed and in fact a liability in this world. Now this world needs productive, creative people who do not contribute to the population problem. This world needs models of happy and full lives with or without offspring. This world needs a renewed sense of sexuality as going beyond procreation of the species only to a reaching for intimacy and companionship with others.

This first contribution of gay and lesbian people is obvious, but there are even more gifts that we can give to the rest of the human race. These gifts include: liberation from gender roles and stereotypes; mutuality in all relationships; responding to hostility in more creative ways than violence; and bringing a dimension to life that is more aesthetic, altruistic, and spiritual. Let's look at these contributions in a little more depth.

(A) Liberation from gender roles and stereotypes.

Because men and women who are erotically drawn to persons of their own gender feel "different" and often alienated from societal norms, they often feel freer of cultural expectations of what it means to be men and women. Assuming the culturally ascribed characteristics and even the attire of the opposite gender are not at all unusual for gay and lesbian persons. This shows the rest of society how contextual and non-universal that gender roles and stereotypes really are.

(B) Mutuality in all relationships.

This world needs models of relationships characterized by mutuality, not by dominance. Those of us who are gay or lesbian have the possibility of knowing more about mutual love between equals in a relationship than most heterosexuals do, because we do not have to act out male dominance over the female, which is so entrenched in just about every culture world-wide. Two men or two women relating together can show what it means to work out a mutual relationship. This is a wonderful gift that we could give to the world.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF HAYLESIAN PEOPLE TO THE HUMAN RACE

The Hay Library Building, No. 12
Office of History Department, 1900

The human beings of the world, especially the gay and foolish people, will never know what they are, but they will not know what they are not. They will not know what they are not, but they will not know what they are not. They will not know what they are not, but they will not know what they are not.

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The research of Yale historian John Boswell shows in fact that gay and lesbian people have already given this gift to Western culture, although this has largely gone unrecognized. The very idea of romantic, mutual love between equals came from same-gender relationships of a friendship and of a sexual nature. A mutual relationship between a man and a woman is impossible in a patriarchal culture where women are regarded as inferior and even as property. Same-gender bonding was very important in ancient Greece, ancient Israel, early Christianity, and monastic Christianity. Boswell, in fact, claims that the first "marriage ceremonies" performed in the context of Christian worship were for couples of the same gender in convents and monasteries. Heterosexual marriage ceremonies were not performed by the church until the second millenium of Christianity. The idea of romantic, mutual love for a Christian couple came from gay and lesbian people, and now there are those who would deny it to us, reserving it for opposite-gender couples only.

Mutuality, of course, is what we should be striving for in all of our relationships, and if we can display mutuality in our primary relationships of an emotional, romantic, and erotic nature, we can transfer that to other relationships in our life - personal friendship, social, economic, political, etc. Gay and lesbian Christians can thus show the rest of the world how to fulfill Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself. This is the crux of human relating for Jesus and for the apostle Paul: love of one's neighbor. Love of neighbor is the basis for determining all of one's actions. Following this commandment, we engage in more mutual, responsible, and caring relationships, treating each other with respect and sensitivity. The principle of loving one's neighbor is applicable to all aspects of human life. To love someone means to care about that person, to be concerned about what happens to him or her. When we use people solely to satisfy our selfish desires, we demean them. When we treat people as objects, whether that be in a business relationship or a sexual relationship, we are obviously not loving them. All of our interactions with other people should be open, honest, considerate, and giving. When we exploit, dominate, or use force on others, we are in effect saying that they are less than we are and that they can be used for our self-indulgence.

(C) Responding to hostility in more creative ways than violence. This world needs the example of gay and lesbian Christians who live Jesus' teaching of loving one's neighbors and one's enemies, of responding to aggression and hostility in other ways than violent retaliation. I have always resonated to the words of the Holly Near song that is often used at gay/lesbian rallies - "We are a gentle, angry people." We are one of the most gentle peoples this world has ever known, but we also have much to be angry about - with the stupidity, misunderstanding, and bigotry we have to put up with day after day, year after year. For the most part we have not responded with violence toward others. Much of our response, to be sure, has been inward-directed violence with alcohol, drugs, lack of care for our bodies and health, and suicide. But we have also responded as a community with non-violent assertion of our dignity and rights. We have not resorted to the tactics of many of our detractors. Our non-violent but assertive approach is greatly needed in a world where the slightest armed aggression can easily lead to nuclear holocaust and where a skirmish in one small part of the world affects every other part of our interdependent "global village".

(D) Bringing an aesthetic, altruistic, and spiritual dimension to life.

Because they have not been restricted by societal expectations and burdened with the necessity of supporting a family, gay and lesbian people all through history have been freer to devote themselves to and to develop within themselves the artistic, the self-giving of service, and the spiritual. It is no accident that there is (and probably always has been) a disproportionate number of gay and lesbian people involved in the arts, the caring professions, and in religious life and the clergy. In these roles gay and lesbian people have served and contributed greatly to society and the Church. They have demonstrated in concrete ways that there is more to life than just eking out a living, grasping, and keeping. Whether there is something inherent in the gay or lesbian personality that is drawn to the aesthetic, altruistic, and/or spiritual, or whether gay and lesbian people have just had more opportunity to develop these sides of themselves is a debate for scholars. It is possible to maintain, however, that the world would be a joyless, hopeless place without the many gay and lesbian people who have given others artistic beauty, selfless caring, and spiritual insights and models.

What we gay and lesbian people have to offer is desperately needed. Eventually we will be seen for the gift we are. We may not see the new day of freedom and understanding ourselves. I really believe the last verse of the hymn we sing called, "LEAD ON, O CLOUD OF YAHWEH". That verse goes: "Lead on, O cloud of Yahweh, our guiding spirit be. Though those who start the journey the promise may not see, we pray our sons and daughters may live to see that land where justice rules with mercy and love is law's demand."

Those who come after us will have a better life because of what we have done.

For more insights on the positive contributions that gay and lesbian persons have given and can give to the rest of the human race, see the book *The Church and the Homosexual* by John McNeill (new edition by Next Year Publications, New York, 1985), especially Chapter 6 on "Toward A Positive Approach of Moral Theology".

